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The impact of the US Rebalancing Policy toward Asia Pacific on International Relations in the region

Abstract

The importance of Asia-Pacific region in United States (US) foreign policy increased in recent years. The US paid special attention to the region during the Obama era declaring the region as a 'pivot'. The US rebalancing policy has economic, political/diplomatic, and military dimensions aimed to increase the US presence in the region and close cooperation with the US's allies. The growing influence of China in combination with the South and East China Sea problems led to the US administration coming up with the rebalancing strategy. The US conducted this policy together with its engagement with China. Therefore, China's perception of the US rebalancing as a kind of containment strategy would not be helpful for the continuation of the strategy. Lack of harmony and disagreements among the US allies in the region challenged the rebalancing policy. The increasing importance of the region in the world economy and the existence of problems in South and East China Sea mean that the US would continue political, economic and military engagement in the region. This paper analyses the main parameters and shortcomings of the US rebalancing strategy in Asia-Pacific and its regional and global implications.

Key words: U.S., China, Asia-Pacific, rebalance, Obama, China Sea.

Introduction

United States (US) President Obama is well known for giving priority to South and East Asia in US foreign policy. The increasing importance of the Asia-Pacific region is the main reason for the US declaration that it

would 'pivot' to the region. The Asia-Pacific economically and politically is taking a central place in world politics. China's active involvement and growing influence in the region and its stand on the South and East China Sea disputes are considered as challenge by the US administration. The US rebalancing policy aimed at strengthening the US ties with its regional allies and expanding the US military presence in the region. There are economic, politic/diplomatic and military aspects of the strategy. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) includes countries that encompass 40% of the global GDP and thus is one of the most important economic aspects of the rebalancing strategy. In the diplomatic field the US administration followed policy of deepening engagement with regional multilateral organizations like the ASEAN Regional Forum. The military aspect is an important part for the rebalancing policy. The US conducted joint military exercises with its allies and took serious steps to increase its naval presence in Asia-Pacific.

In this paper the US rebalancing policy will be analyzed dealing with its shortcomings and the US relations with key regional actors. The US position regarding the South and East China Sea problems will also be evaluated with the parameters of the rebalancing strategy. The paper aims to try to understand the reasons of the US rebalancing policy and the difficulties of following the policy while continuing its current engagement with China. To conduct the rebalancing policy without creating at least the perception of containment is the difficult job. The paper evaluates this policy whilst stressing the fact that the world is quite different than the Cold War era in which the US engaged in an active containment strategy against the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the paper explains the interest of the parties in the region with the realist and neo-realist view, on the other hand it accepts that regional and global parameters, especially the current relations between the US and China, have different aspects than realist arguments envisaged.

As Robert Sutter, Michael Brown, Timothy Adamson, Mike Mochizuki, and Deepa Ollapally argued, that despite the fact that there has been considerable continuity in US policy toward Asia-Pacific region, the US reestablished its regional priority and the rebalancing policy should be considered significant shift in the US policy. Obama considered the region as a geostrategic priority and showed this with increasingly high-level diplomatic engagements (Sutter et al. 2013, pp. 6–7). Although the rebalancing policy has political/diplomatic and economic dimensions, some just emphasized its military dimension. Robert Ross considered

rebalancing policy as shifting in strategy in order to bolster the US defensive ties with countries and expand its naval presence. He argued that US enhanced presence in the region will reassure ally states (see Ross 2012, pp. 70–82). Arguments emphasized the military dimension of the strategy generally view the rebalancing as a kind of containment policy against a rising China. In China some considered the rebalancing strategy as ‘peaceful containment’ like Zhu Feng, who argued that the US will continue its engagement policy with China while trying to consolidate its leadership. Some, like Jin Canrong and Wang Yizhou, argued that this is betting on both sides and not simply a containment. They evaluated the rebalancing policy as it includes both engagement and precautionary measures (Dong & Chengzhi 2013, pp. 9–12).

Hillary Clinton explained the US rebalancing policy in her article titled “America’s Pacific Century.” She described the Asia-Pacific as a key of global politics. She emphasized the necessity to improve allies’ defense capacities and to upgrade security and stability, the US will redistribute its forces in Asia in order to be more effective towards security threats. She also described the policy as the US strategic return of Asia-Pacific. Clinton also focused on economic importance of the region and economic aspects of the US strategy. She stated that “a focus on promoting American prosperity means a greater focus on trade and economic openness in the Asia-Pacific.” She links the region’s economic growth and its potential for continued growth in the future with security and stability. She emphasized the US’s military role for that and argued that territorial and maritime disputes as well as new threats for the freedom of navigation requires the US to have politically sustainable force posture in the region (Clinton 2011, pp. 56–63).

The US Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South and East China Sea were viewed by China similar to a Hollywood blockbuster. China also considered the operations as undermining the authority of China. Hu Bo argued that these operations exert pressure on China and also appeases US allies in the region and serves as useful diplomatic tools for the US (Bo 2016). Glaser stated that China needs a favorable regional security environment and China will try to reach an understanding with its neighbors. However, China should face pressure and US backing of ASEAN members is necessary. The US should have clarified the limits of its involvement in regional disputes to its allies so they would know how to deal with China (Glaser 2012, p. 8).

This paper anticipated the fact that the US rebalancing policy has multidimensional aspects and it cannot be considered as just a military

strategy to contain China. However, the character of the South and East China Sea disputes dictated the overemphasized notion of the military aspect of the strategy. This caused additional difficulty for the US to follow the rebalancing policy together with the engagement with China. The success of the strategy necessitated more emphasis of diplomatic and economic aspects of rebalancing. There is also another issue which would impact the direction of rebalancing, in that how the policy will be perceived by China. That is why to analyze China's perception and evaluation of rebalancing policy is necessary to assess the impact of the rebalancing policy in the region.

How is the US Asia-Pacific Policy Shaped? The Reasons for Rebalancing

The US administrations throughout history have been interested in the Asia-Pacific region. During the Cold War era the region was important to prevent the Soviet influence and invasion from the view of the US. After the Cold War, the Asia-Pacific became important in the political and economic standing of the US in the world. However, there are developments which forced the US policy makers to pay attention to the Middle East. For example, just before the formal end of the Cold War, the US engaged in a war in Iraq, due to the Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. In 2001, the US faced the 9/11 terrorists attacks and Operation Enduring Freedom conducted in Afghanistan (Kasım 2013a, pp. 35–36). Following this, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 was another element, which increased the US's focus to the Middle East. This does not mean that before the Obama era the US totally neglected the Asia-Pacific. Post-Cold War US Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush also actively engaged in the Asia-Pacific. For example, Clinton declared the New Pacific Community Initiative in 1993. Bush promoted bilateral cooperation with regional allies and encouraged free trade agreements with them. In 2006 the US conducted the largest Pacific Ocean military exercise since the Vietnam War (see Sutter et al. 2013, pp. 5–6). However, Obama's focus on the region was much more extensive and assertive. President Obama had a new approach towards the Asia-Pacific region. He announced a renewed US focus on the region and Obama reoriented significant elements of the US foreign policy towards the Asia-Pacific (Campbell and Andrews 2013, p. 2). Obama launched the US policy of a 'strategic pivot' or 'rebalancing' during his landmark address to

the Australian Parliament on November 17, 2011. Obama stated that “Our new focus on the region reflects a fundamental truth – The United States has been, and always will be, a Pacific nation.” “Here, we see the future. As the world’s fastest-growing region – and home to more than half the global economy – the Asia Pacific is critical to achieving my highest priority, and that’s creating jobs and opportunity for the American people.” Obama further emphasized that he made a deliberate and strategic decision that the US will play a larger and long-term role in shaping the Asia-Pacific region and its future (Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament, 17 November 2011).

One of the main reasons for the shift of US policy towards Asia-Pacific was the economic success of the Asia-Pacific countries. Security aspects combined with the rise of the Peoples Republic of China (PRC) was another reason for the US’s new engagement. In fact, Obama underlined the importance of security during his speech in the Australian Parliament saying that “we seek security, which is the foundation of peace and prosperity.” Obama also mentioned that the US modernized its defense posture across the Asia Pacific and it would be more broadly distributed and maintaining the US strong presence in Japan and Korea while enhancing the US presence in Southeast Asia (Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament, 17 November 2011).

The US’s first priority in order to implement its rebalancing policy was to strengthen the US alliances. The US particularly paid attention to its relations with Japan and the South Korea. The US-Australian relations have been focused also in this context. The US also tried to improve its relations with other regional states and emerging powers. The US-PRC relations, its relations with India and the US-Taiwan relations are important to build understanding and enhance cooperation in the Asia-Pacific for the US strategy. The US’s rebalancing policy has an economic aspect, which aims to facilitate Asia-Pacific economic integration. The US paid special attention to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the TPP. The US joined negotiations for the TPP in 2010 and the agreement was signed on February 4, 2016. The US also focused on improving multilateral institutions of the region. The US acknowledged that a strong and integrated ASEAN is in the US’s national interest (Campbell & Andrews 2013, pp. 4–7).

The US attended at a record level key Southeast Asian diplomatic conferences and increased military and economic engagement in the Asia Pacific countries. Despite the fact that the rebalancing strategy has not

only military component, it also has economic and political dimensions, it was perceived by the PRC as the US's containment strategy. The military aspect of the rebalancing required strong military ties with Australia, Singapore, and the Philippines (see Sutter et al. 2013, pp. 11–13). In 2011, the US signed an agreement with Australia, which includes the deployment of 2,500 US marines to Australia. The agreement represented the first long-term expansion of US military presence in the Asia-Pacific since the end of the Vietnam War (Calmes 2011). The US signed a 10-year agreement with the Philippines which gave the US military greater access to the bases in the Philippines. The US received the right to rotate troops and other military assets throughout Philippine territory without the ownership of bases, which is prohibited according to the Philippine Constitution. The US also reached an agreement with South Korea to improve the joint operation of the existing missile defense system (Kasım 2014). In fact, the other regional countries, which feel suspicious about the PRC's activities in the region, demanded active US involvement and they seek opportunity to train, exercise, and interact with the US military. However, the US engagement in the Asia-Pacific embedded a broader national agenda including diplomacy, trade, development, values, and multilateral institutions (Campbell & Andrews 2013, p. 8). Economic aspects of the rebalancing are mainly presented with the TPP, which includes 12 states and their GDP encompassing 40% of the global GDP. Although the TPP was signed on February 4, 2016, the ratification process of the agreement in the parliaments of the signatory countries continued.

The question raised about the TPP's sustainability regarding the establishment of a regional trade network, since the PRC is not a part of it (see Atıl 2016, p. 63). In fact the TPP was introduced as a tool to limit the uncontrollable spread of Chinese economic expansion. President Obama in his State of Union Address to Congress in January 2015 stated that "China wants to write the rules for the world's fastest-growing region. That would put our workers and our businesses at a disadvantage. Why would we let that happen? We should write those rules. We should level the playing field" (see Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address, 20 January 2015). Some argued that Chinese participation in the TPP should be considered. This is similar to Clinton's strategy to support the PRC's integration into the World Trade Organization. The US could continue economic and diplomatic engagement with China and try to display the benefits of cooperation. China on the other hand might try to persuade US allies that it will not pose a threat to countries in

the region while placing more emphasis on diplomatic efforts (Hsu 2015; Sutter et al. 2013, p. 5).

The US new engagement of the Asia-Pacific was the response of the rise of the region and increasingly assertive policy of the PRC. As a result the US rebalancing policy was generally perceived an attempt to contain China. However, there were problems and shortcomings of this policy and the perceptions which later resulted in criticism of the US's new engagement in the region.

Shortcomings of the US Rebalancing Policy

Obama's rebalancing policy had some risks and shortcomings. One question should be asked is how this policy would be conducted together with engagement with China. If the US would continue in engagement policy toward China, the rebalance strategy requires careful implementation. Despite the statements that the US would not want to exclude China from regional initiatives, China perceived the US policy as a containment strategy. The difficult job for the US administration is that while the US continues its commitment toward regional allies, it must also avoid provoking China and continue to pursuing constructive engagement. However, the rebalancing strategy might face budgetary restrictions since military engagement in Asia-Pacific requires a large naval presence and active military support of the US allies. To avoid this obstacle, budget cuts is to be minimized to the navy. The US also faced criticism from Europe as neglecting European allies following the rebalancing strategy in Asia-Pacific (see Kasım 2015, pp. 90–91).

The rebalancing policy is supposed to restrict 'rising China's' influence in the Asia-Pacific. However, China's stand on the regional issues has not changed and the US regional allies increased their demands for support from the US. Although some argued that the rebalance does not mean just to contain China, it is viewed as a way to contain China in the Asia-Pacific and the world. Therefore, some argued that the US strategy has failed because it has not been hard enough on China (Connelly 2015, pp. 2–5). The US allies also expected from the US at least to restrict China if not a total containment strategy. The US foreign policy and Obama's statements about the rebalancing may not be considered as enough reassurance for the US allies since they need to see definite US commitment in a time of the crisis. That is why conjectural problems in

the US would impact on its allies. For example, Obama did not attend APEC Forum in 2013, which questioned the US commitment to the Asia-Pacific, although Obama did not participate because of the domestic crisis. Countries like Vietnam would shape its China policy through measuring the US support and commitment (see Parlez & Cochrane 2013).

In the case of massive trade between the US and China, the US rebalancing policy could not be evolved into a Cold War type containment strategy, as Joseph Nye argued that the US containment strategy of the Soviet Union refers to virtually no trade and little social contact. Yet the US currently maintains a massive trade agreement with the PRC and extensive social contacts including 157,000 Chinese students at US universities (Nye 2013). The US direct investment to the region is over 700 billion USD and annual US exports more than 400 billion USD.¹ Therefore, the conditions are very different from the Cold War era.

One of the obstacles for the effective US rebalance strategy to the Asia-Pacific is the lack of interest towards the region within the US Members of Congress. They are interested in the region just due to a large immigrant or ethnic population in their district. The Asia-Pacific, despite the Obama administration's over focus on the region, has captured very little attention of the US public and media. For example during President Obama's travel to China, Myanmar, and Australia in November 2014, the press plane chartered for the trip was half full (Connelly 2015, p. 11).

Another US shortcoming in the rebalance strategy was lack of harmony among US allies. For example, while the US is trying to establish triple special alliance among US-Japan-South Korea, however, disputes between Japan and South Korea regarding the so-called 'comfort women' issue to the territorial dispute, weakened the US position in the region and gave greater movement to act for China (Çolakoğlu 2016, pp. 60–61).

South and East China Sea Problems: The Headache for the US Rebalancing Strategy

Another dispute, which creates a rift among the US allies, is the South and East China Sea problems. Particularly the South China Sea dispute became a widely discussed problem due to its potential to cause armed

¹ <http://www.statista.com/statistics/188604/united-states-direct-investments-in-the-asia-pacific-region-since-2000/>.

conflict in the region. The PRC, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan have clashing sovereignty claims over the South China Sea.

The South and East China Sea disputes put the US in a difficult situation due to the disputes between Taiwan and Japan and Taiwan and Philippines, which are the US allies in the region. For example, a Taiwanese fisherman was shot by the Philippine coast guard in the disputed Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which created tension between Taiwan and the Philippines in 2013. Taiwan demanded a formal apology from the government of the Philippines, compensation for the fisherman's family, cooperative investigation and punishment of the perpetrators, as well as the launching of talks on a bilateral fishery arrangement in order to prevent similar incidents to be repeated in the future. The US also put effort so these types of incidents were not to be repeated among its regional allies. The last thing the US wants is conflict between two important partners in the region: Taiwan and the Philippines (Kasım 2013).

The conflict takes place around Spratly (Nansha) and Paracel (Shisha) islands as well as the Pratas (Tungsha), Natuna, and Scarborough Shoal. The PRC claims sovereignty on the map with a U-shaped line referred to as the 'nine-dash line' (Tsirbas 2016). Actually the 'nine-dash line' was originally identified as the 'eleven-dash line'. In 1947, the Kuomintang (KMT) government of China released a map titled "position of the South China Sea Islands." The eleven-dash line was used to define a scope of Chinese sovereignty over the South China Sea at that time. After the Chinese communists took power of the mainland, they cancelled the two intermittent lines and the PRC started to use the nine-dash line to support its sovereignty claims over the South China Sea. The reason for that was basically the ideological cooperation between the PRC and the regime in North Vietnam (Pu 2015).

Taiwan presented similar arguments regarding sovereignty over the South China Sea. Taiwan's argument bases itself on historical grounds to justify its claims over the area. However, there are differences between the PRC's and Taiwan's positions. Taiwan upholds its claims to sovereignty over the South China Sea. However, Taiwan does not fully support the PRC's South China Sea policy. Taiwan adheres to the notion that the dispute to be solved through international law since it does not support territorial sovereignty through the man-made islands. Taiwan promotes cooperation among regional countries to solve the dispute and does not support the unilateral extraction of sand from the seabed or the reclamation of land from underwater reefs (Yann-Huei Song 2015).

Overlapping claims regarding the Paracel (Shisha) islands have caused conflict between Vietnamese troops and the PRC. As a result, the PRC seized the Paracel (Shisha) Islands, killing more than 70 Vietnamese soldiers in 1974. In 1988, 60 more Vietnamese soldiers died in the conflict. Natural resources, especially oil and gas reserves, are the key factors that triggered the sovereignty dispute in the South China Sea. In May 2014, the PRC's drilling operations near the Paracel (Shisha) Islands carried out by maritime vessels were intercepted by Vietnam's vessels. Thus, a collision occurred between the Vietnamese and the PRC vessels and caused riots targeted against the Chinese living in Vietnam. As a result, Taiwanese factories were also attacked (Chubb 2014). Similar problems have occurred between the PRC and the Philippines over the Spratly Islands (Nansha). The Philippines applied to the Permanent Court of Arbitration and called for a halt on all construction projects in the South China Sea. The US would be pushed to be involved in the China-Philippines conflict because of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty between the US and Philippines. Despite that fact that the treaty states

Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific Area on either of the Parties would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.²

The US is not inclined to take sides in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. On the other hand, regarding the dispute between Japan and China about the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands, the US president expressed clear support for Japan, stating that Article 5 of the US-Japan Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty included the disputed islands (Panda 2014).

The South China Sea dispute caused tension among the US and the PRC. In October 2015, a US destroyer vessel passed through the PRC's artificially constructed islands, and the PRC intercepted their vessels. Freedom of navigation in the region caused a rift between the US and PRC over the right of US military vessels to operate in China's 200 mile EEZ. The US is based its argument about the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and stated that nothing in UNCLOS and

² See http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/phil001.asp.

state practice prevents the right of military forces of all nations to conduct military activities in EEZ's without coastal state notice or consent. The US reconnaissance flights conducted in China's EEZ are intercepted routinely by the PRC. A possible miscalculation may cause military escalation and an unexpected acceleration of political crisis (Glaser 2012, pp. 1–2; Larter 2016). Despite the fact that the US bases its arguments on UNCLOS, the US Congress declined to ratify UNCLOS, which weakens the US role regarding the subject matter (Connelly 2015, p. 11). The US military presence and passage near the China's artificial islands each time caused China to emphasize its claims and a harsh response to the official level. For example after the five-day patrol of the US Stennis Carrier Strike Group in the South China Sea, PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that "like the tide that comes and goes, none of these attempts will have any impact. History will prove who is merely the guest and who is the real host" (Larter 2016).

As part of its policy of rebalancing, the US tried to promote close cooperation among its allies. The Philippines and Japan signed an important defense agreement on February 29, 2016. The agreement allowed the transfer of defense equipment and technology from Japan to the Philippines and it made possible for the Philippines and Japan to conduct joint research and development, and even joint production of defense equipment and technology (Castro 2016). Taiwan proposed the South China Sea Peace Initiative on May 26, 2015, by urging all parties to comply with international law and reduce tension. In 2013, Taiwan and Japan managed to sign a fishing agreement over the East China Sea that granted Taiwanese vessels access to the disputed waters of the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands. Taiwan's initiative for the South China Sea bore its first fruit on November 5, 2015, when Taiwan and the Philippines signed the Facilitation of Cooperation on Law Enforcement in Fishery Matters agreement that reduced fishery tension between the two (Kasim 2016). However, the dispute, particularly regarding Taiping Island, continues between Taiwan and the Philippines. Historically, Taiwan claimed that Taiping (Itu Aba) Island qualified as an island according to the specifications of Article 121 of UNCLOS. Taiwan argued that Taiping Island can sustain human habitation and economic life of its own. But, the Philippines argued that Taiping is not an island because of its lack of water supply and fertile soil making it inconvenient for habitants. However, Taiwan stated that Taiping Island is the only island in the Spratly (Nansha) Islands to have its own sources of potable water. The US has not clarified its position

regarding on Article 121 and arguments of Taiwan and the Philippines. Some in the US administration argued that the US is entitled to claim an EEZ around all its possessions, whether inhabited or not, without regard to size or location (Song 2016; Kasım 2016). Taiwan did not recognize the Philippines application to the Permanent Court of Arbitration on the South China Sea disputes. Taiwan stated that the Philippines did not extend an invitation to Taiwan to participate in its arbitration with mainland China, since the arbitral tribunal did not solicit Taiwan's views. Therefore, Taiwan refuses to recognize the arbitration or any agreements since it will not affect Taiwan (Tiezzi 2015). The Philippines won the arbitration case against China. The Permanent Court of Arbitration decided that the Philippines has exclusive sovereign rights over the West Philippine Sea in the South China Sea and that China's nine-dash line is invalid. However, China and Taiwan do not recognize the arbitration (Santos 2016).

The success of the US rebalancing strategy is very much dependent on the relations among its allies. Therefore the relations among the Philippines, Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam, Australia, Malaysia, and Indonesia will indicate the future of US regional policy. In fact most regional states supported the US rebalance policy although some like Thailand and Malaysia avoid choosing sides between the US and China. Countries which have territorial and security disputes with the PRC, such as Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea, gave open support to the US policy. The real challenge for the US is to provide strategic reassurance to its allies without provoking a strategic backlash from the PRC (Sutter et al. 2013, p. 3).

Conclusions

The US foreign policy paid attention to the Asia-Pacific due to the region's strategic and economic importance for the US. During the Cold War era, Asia-Pacific policy focused on preventing communist expansion. After the Cold War the US policy focused on economic integration and protect of freedom of navigation in the South and East China Sea. Although Bill Clinton and George W. Bush also paid attention to the region, the Obama era was important in terms of its rebalancing policy which has diplomatic/political, economic, and military dimensions. The US declared its objective to play a larger and extensive role in shaping the future of the region. However, as we discussed in the paper there

are risks and shortcomings in the US strategy. To conduct the policy at the same time the engagement with China is difficult and challenging. China perceived the US strategy as containment of China. The US allies in the region expected the US to reduce China's influence whatever the means necessary. However, another difficulty is the lack of cooperation and harmony among the US allies. This even carries risk of conflicts among them. The US also has domestic constraints to carry out the rebalancing policy. One constraint is budgetary, which may become an issue regarding having a large naval presence in the region permanently. Another constraint is the lack of interest towards the region in the US Congress. The US has also been criticized by its European allies for giving too much emphasize on the Asia-Pacific and neglecting Europe.

The US rebalancing policy was the result of the increasing influence of China and the region's growing impact on world politics. The US aimed to show that it would continue to engage in the Asia-Pacific and continue to support its allies, with domestic problems not diverting the US from its policies. The US worried that the maritime territorial disputes will negative have impact on trade across the Asia-Pacific region. To prevent this, the rebalancing policy was implemented using political/diplomatic, economic and military means. As this paper clearly indicates that the rebalancing strategy is mainly analyzed by many by just focusing on the military part of it. However, the rebalancing, as it was mentioned in this paper, can only have a meaningful result if other aspects of the strategy are also being used. If the strategy is not all about containing China, the US should put more emphasis on diplomatic and economic means and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region. Since the US does not want to be involved directly in the military conflict in the region, it would be an option for the US to help the Philippines, Vietnam, and other allies to enhance their capabilities to defend their maritime claims.

In the near future China cannot match the hard and soft power capacities of the US. Therefore to keep peace and security in the Asia-Pacific is in the interest of both the US and China. The US should give more attention on how China perceives the rebalancing strategy. As long as China perceives it as a containment strategy it will concentrate on increasing its military presence in the region. However, military confrontation and any kind of interruption of the trade in Asia-Pacific would not be the interest of China. This fact may force the parties of the South and East China Sea problem to reach a kind of consensus at least to prevent military conflict from erupting. The US rebalancing policy and its support of its allies may give China

a message to compromise with other regional actors. The challenge for the US is to do that without provoking China. The economic integration and continuation of regional economic growth will help the rebalancing strategy and to improve relations between China, the US, and its allies.

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